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• **Barry** *continued from page 21*

WEEKLY: *A lot of people regard your strip as a "relationship strip," but I see it as much more universal than that.*

BARRY: Yeah, except for the *Esquire* thing it hasn't really been about relationships for a long time. And I always forget, the strips I do for *Esquire* seem so different from my regular work that it's like having my period every month — I have it and I forget it. It comes as a surprise once a month. I like my newspaper work a lot better. I know that the *Esquire* work is a lot more accessible to the general public but . . . see, one thing, I never wanted to be a *cartoonist*. I think that there are certain things that I do differently than a lot of cartoonists do, like I don't have a character or even a particular drawing style that I'm attached to. So what happens with my strip is it seems to come in these groups, and right now it's been a lot about childhood, child-abuse. Though sometimes it's on a roll where it's funnier and more about lighter topics — some of it's about food — but they always seem to come in groups, and there's really nothing I can do about it.

WEEKLY: *Sometimes it's really nice and grim.*

BARRY: Yeah, and those are fine. I really like those kinds of strips that aren't happy and aren't cheerful, and I don't know if I've seen comic strips like that before. That're not trying to give you information about wildlife, and they're not trying to make a joke, and they're not doing science fiction.

WEEKLY: *Speaking of child-abuse, suddenly physical molestation is really topical, and I don't think that's even a micro-part of it. I mean real child-abuse is psychic, and it's constant, and every child is forced to endure it, right?*

BARRY: Yeah. I do not believe that there is such a thing as a happy childhood; I don't think anyone's ever had one. I think "happy" and "childhood" . . . What are they, oxymoronic? But those are also the best years of your life, and I don't think that any progressive loss of innocence . . . See, one of the things about doing the strips that I like is I get to find out things while I do them. Such as when your own ideas of racism first begin — just what you see as not being true, but that you had to accept until you grew up, just accepting it — all these kinds of rotten things. So that's one of the benefits of the work I do. I have this job where all I do is sit around and think about things like this. I can't believe that's how I make my living.

WEEKLY: *Have you ever undergone actual so-called therapy?*

BARRY: Sure, yeah, I'm in therapy now. I'm really thankful that I have the money and the courage to see a therapist. It's so funny, because when people admit that they're seeing a therapist, it's sort of this hush-hush thing, even though if you were going to your aerobics class you would actually shout about it in a cafeteria to let people know that you were really cool.

"I try to stay out of my strips as much as I can. I find that when I try to do something autobiographical I lose my ability to edit or choose what's important, because it becomes my story, and I'm sort of onstage."

People in therapy try to keep it down. It's not that I worry about people thinking I have psychological problems, but because it's such a corny thing to do. And I went because I was really suffering from depression, I mean chronic depression. It was getting to the point where I either had to see somebody or I was going to be depressed, *period*, so it really helped a lot. Now I can go for a walk and actually notice the spring, you know, like normal things that people get to do. I used to have to go to bed if I saw a grease stain on a magazine page.

WEEKLY: *You mean somebody previously had been eating peanut butter while reading it?*

BARRY: I don't know. I mostly just use that image because it makes me laugh.

WEEKLY: *But do you, uh, keep your periodicals neat?*

BARRY: Are you crazy? There's no such thing as neatness in my home.

WEEKLY: *I mean, do you have any individual caches of precious objects?*

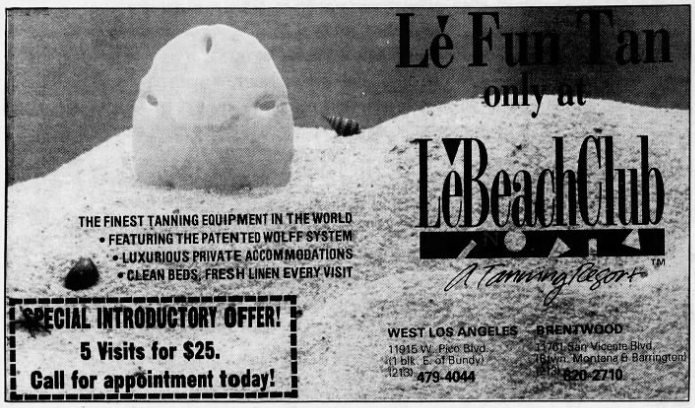
BARRY: Yeah, I have tons of them, and most of them have paint on them. My stereo has paint on it, my favorite books have paint — paint's kind of all over everything. That's something I wrestle with. Even in my strip, I wrestle with the fact that I wish my handwriting were better, I wish my drawing was a little neater. And it's difficult when my pen isn't clean enough, or I have to waste 45 minutes looking for an eraser.

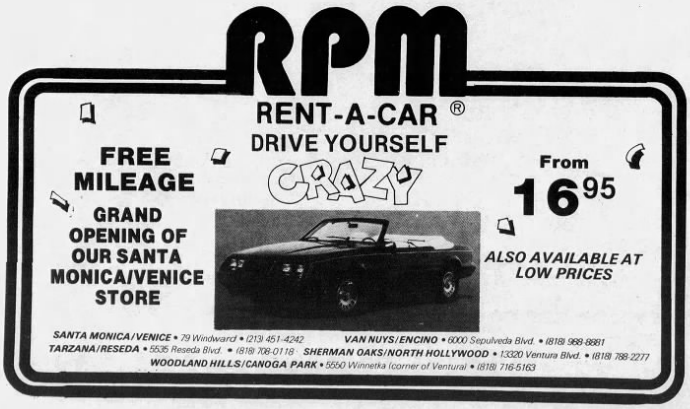
WEEKLY: *You don't have an eraser on a chain around your neck?*

BARRY: I have about 50 erasers, but my house is like the Bermuda Triangle. I have triples of everything, and I can't find anything.

WEEKLY: *So how much of "you" is there in your strip?*

BARRY: I try to stay out of my strips as much as I can. Even though they're written in the first person, they're written in a character. They're not *me* writing. I find that when I try to do something autobiographical I lose my ability to edit or choose what's important, because it becomes my story, and I'm sort of onstage. For some reason, first person is easier for me to write in, but oftentimes the person is speaking as a boy, or a girl, or a black. When I read stuff like "She went to the door . . . she saw this" I hear it in *adventure voice*, and I can't have adventure voice in my strip. ■





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